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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 006255

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: False Witness/Al-Hariri
Investigations, US/Iran

1. Summary: Syrian newspapers continued to focus on revelations by the Syrian "masked witness," Husam Tahir Husam, who gave false testimony to the international investigation commission in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. The papers view Husam's account, as told in a television interview and a news conference on 27 and 28 November, respectively, as a condemnation of a group of Lebanese politicians and media figures and as proof that the accusations against Syria in connection with Al-Hariri's assassination are fabricated. Headlines featured an official Syrian statement calling on Lebanese judicial authorities and the IIC to stop the issuance of misinformation against Syria, saying that "Husam cannot be truthful in Beirut and untruthful in Damascus."

Syrian papers also reported that Zalmay Khalilzad, US Ambassador to Iraq, has been given permission to meet with officials from Iran to deal specifically with issues related to Iraq.

End of summary.

2. Selected Headlines:

"Syria warns against misleading the investigation into the Al-Hariri assassination. Seven items in the international report were based on false testimony. An official source calls for investigation of falsifications to unveil the truth, and calls on Lebanese judicial authorities and the IIC to stop falsification and blackmail: Husam cannot be truthful in Beirut and untruthful in Damascus" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/30)

"Lebanese Interior Ministry confirms the meeting between Interior Minister Al-Saba' and the 'masked witness' Husam Husam. Lebanese As-Safir and Ad-Diyar newspapers call for dealing seriously with Husam's confessions. Former Lebanese Minister Wahab: Mehli's report has completely collapsed" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/30)

"After seeking Tehran's mediation, Washington seeks contacts with gunmen and acknowledges failure of its military means" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/3)

"Israeli and Palestinian security forces exchange fire in the West Bank town of Bethlehem. Occupation forces attack Ofar detention camp. Fifty Palestinian detainees injured in tent-burning and clashes with Israeli forces" (Government-owned A-Ba'th, 11/30)

3. Editorial Block Quotes:

"The Rope of Lies"

Umar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (11/30): "Hidden hands are behind the fabrication of the trouble between Syria and Lebanon.... But the bonds between the two countries are too strong to be harmed by a group of rancorous people who shed crocodile tears over Al-Hariri but have sought help from foreigners and have ridden the wave of foreign schemes to serve their personal interests. These people prepared witnesses to harm Syria's reputation and implicate it in the Al-Hariri assassination, deliberately ignoring the Israelis and the Americans, who have a genuine interest in besieging and harming Syria...."

"Syria, which is definitely innocent of the Al-Hariri assassination, wants the truth more than any other party. The truth is now a Syrian demand more than a Lebanese demand. Syria is awaiting fair judgment on this sensitive issue. In defense for its dignity and sovereignty, it has cooperated and will fully cooperate with the United Nations to anchor the values of justice and peace in our region based on international law and the noble principles of human rights and the rights of peoples and countries...."

"Truth for the Sake of Syria"

Isam Dari, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, commented (11/30): "The masked witness Husam offered extremely important and serious information.... This time we seek the truth not only for the sake of uncovering who killed Al-Hariri but also for the sake of Syria, which some Lebanese politicians and journalists wanted to implicate forcibly in a heinous crime...."

"Lies and ready accusations were fabricated against Syria to

neutralize it and force it by all available means to change its national and pan-Arab positions....

"If the investigations take their normal course, Syria's innocence will be declared and the planners and perpetrators of the crime will be uncovered...."

"In the Name of the Lebanese People and their Establishments"

Ahmad Dawwa, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (11/30): "Husam's revelations prove that a political and media group exploited Al-Hariri's blood to turn Lebanon into a base for hatching conspiracies against Syria, against the will of the majority of the Lebanese people."

"Government and parliamentary parties are fully involved in this, but without the knowledge of the Chamber of Deputies and the government as official Lebanese establishments....

"Isn't the participation of a minister from Al-Saniora's cabinet in pressuring a witness to give false testimony to an international commission a serious conspiracy against Syria? Isn't the supervision by the leader of the biggest bloc in the Lebanese parliament of financing and fabricating these conspiracies a kind of turning Lebanon ... into a base for plotting against Syria?

"Husam made extremely serious revelations condemning those who exploited Al-Hariri's assassination to ride on the American political wave in the region, one seeking to force Lebanon and Syria to surrender to Israel.... The revelations have shown the truth about those who claim to be advocates of freedom and independence and exposed all their slogans and promises to the Lebanese people.

"The Lebanese judiciary must take legal action against these people for misleading justice.... The ball is now in the court of the Lebanese people and their nationalist forces, and in the court of the government and the Chamber of Deputies. We do not believe that many in the two establishments will be willing to continue working politically with a team that seeks to hatch plots against Syria and to subjugate Lebanon."

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